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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MFA DISAPPOINTED WITH LIBYAN VISIT

REF: TRIPOLI 243

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M. Satterfield
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: There were no specific discussions on upgrading diplomatic relations during the Sept 24-25 Libyan delegation visit to Baghdad, much to the disappointment of the Iraqi MFA. The delegation, primarily of Qadhafi relatives, offered condolences to President Talabani, PM Jaafari, and Minister of Interior Jabr for the almost 1000 deaths from the August 31 stampede on the A'imma Bridge. They contributed 24 million Iraqi dinars (\$18,000 US) to the al-Kadhimiya mosque foundation and asked for the names of the 1,300 families who were affected by the tragedy in order to provide direct assistance. Iraqi National Security Advisor Rubaie told DCM September 29 that the real reason for Libyan overtures to Iraq, especially the Shia, was the hope that Grand Ayatollah Sistani would declare Libya innocent of involvement in the 1978 disappearance of Imam Musa Sadr. End Summary.

2. (C) The nine-member Libyan delegation, on an unofficial visit, was headed by Mufta A'dlew, Chairman of the Al-Refi Bank. All but one member of the group were from Qadhafi's clan and demanded VIP treatment during their visit. They had planned to stay eight days but left after two. Much to the disappointment of the Iraqi MFA, which had hoped the delegation would discuss the opening of an embassy in Baghdad, the entire visit focused on the August 31 A'imma Bridge tragedy, in which almost 1000 Shia Iraqis on a religious procession died. According to the Iraqi MFA official who sat in on all the meetings, there was only general talk about improving relations.

3. (SBU) The group visited President Talabani, Prime Minister Jaafari, and Interior Minister Jabr to offer condolences. They went to the site of the tragedy and the nearby al-Kadhimiya mosque, contributing 24 million Iraqi dinars (\$18,000 US) to the mosque foundation. They also asked for the names of all 1,300 families that suffered in the tragedy in order to provide them with direct financial assistance.

4. (C) Iraqi National Security Advisor Mouaffaq Rubaie told DCM on September 29 that the real reason for the Libyan visit was to improve relations with Iraqi Shia as a way of gaining support from Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Two months earlier, Qadhafi had sent an intermediary to Sistani asking for a fatwa exonerating Qadhafi in the case of the "disappeared" Shia Imam Musa Sadr, who vanished during a 1978 visit to Tripoli. Sistani declined the request, but Rubaie appears convinced that he could bring Sistani around through gestures such as donations for the A'imma Bridge disaster and improving relations with "Shia" Iraq. Rubaie noted to DCM that Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri had gotten wind of Qadhafi's intentions and had called "nearly hysterical" to plead for Sistani's rejection of the Libyan request for absolution in the Musa Sadr case -- which Berri has championed for decades as a means of enhancing his authority and (highly dubious) legitimacy as Sadr's "heir." Khalilzad